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INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1666
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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SUBJECT: Campaigning for Legislative Election Begins, Opposition in Limbo

¶1. Summary: On September 27, President Tandja appeared on State television (Tele-Sahel) to discuss the National Assembly election slated for October 20. He outlined the importance of the poll, urging Nigeriens to vote in mass and to "choose competent men and women in order to set up a National Assembly that is worthy of its name." The opposition, which has denounced the election, declared on September 26 that it will boycott the election. Although the opposition continues to call for the resignation of President Tandja, it is clear that it has lost its resolve and is giving President Tandja "carte blanche" to supplement his strengthened executive branch with a supportive legislature. End summary.

National Assembly Likely to Comprise Tandja Supporters

¶2. On September 27, minutes after President Tandja's address to the nation, election "kickoff" events took place throughout the country.

The Constitutional Court announced on September 19 that 765 candidates were eligible to participate in the National Assembly election, with 76 having no party affiliation. All 765 candidates are vying for 113 seats in the National Assembly; 30 additional seats will be hand-picked by the President.

¶3. On September 26, the Coalition of Democratic Forces for the Republic (CFDR), one of the main opposition umbrella organizations, declared that it would organize a massive boycott of the legislative election slated for October 20. The opposition's across the board decision to boycott the elections ensures that President Tandja will have a strong majority of supporters in the National Assembly.

¶4. Comment: The administration of President Tandja has engaged in a concerted campaign of harassing and persecuting those who oppose remaining in power. Opposition figures have gone into hiding or self-imposed self-censorship, and fear that publicly criticizing President Tandja could land them in prison. Furthermore, recent calls for protest have yielded minimal turnout; for example, on September 26 fewer than 100 individuals participated in a protest in Niamey despite opposition calls for massive demonstrations nationwide. This lack of coordination, political will, and lack of historic precedent of the citizenry taking to the streets to protest leave the opposition's hopes of a political roll-back wanting. End comment.

WHITAKER